

20876

*City Document.*—No. 56.

---

---

**CITY OF BOSTON.**

---

---



---

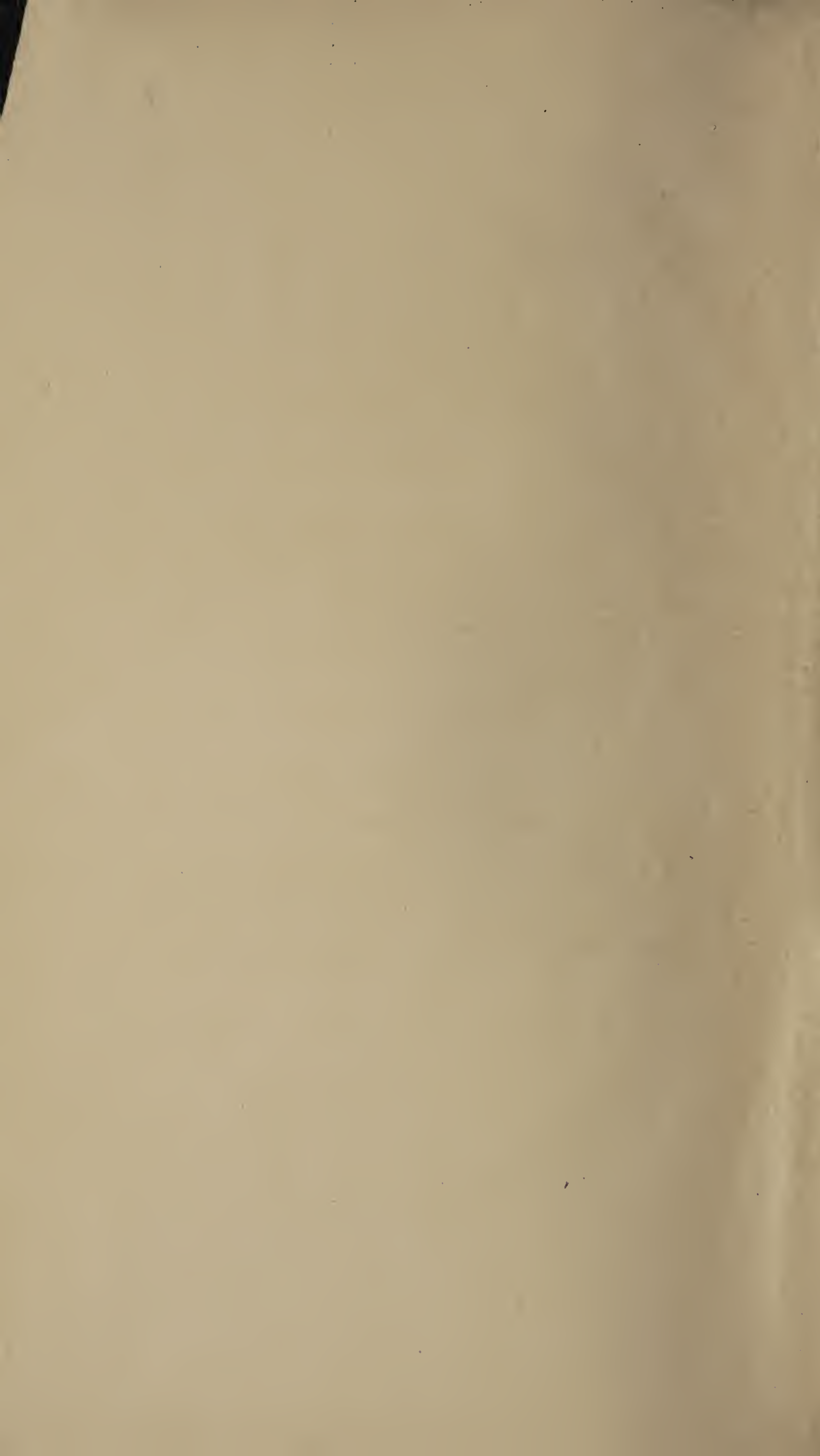
---

REPORT OF COMMITTEE  
ON THE  
PRESERVATION OF THE HANCOCK HOUSE.

1863.

---

---



6-1-18  
3525  
B651

CITY OF BOSTON.

---

*In Board of Aldermen, May 18, 1863.*

ORDERED: That Alderman Amory, Denio, and Tyler, with such as the Common Council may join, be a Joint Special Committee to consider the expediency of any measures for the preservation of the Hancock House, in Beacon Street.

Sent down for concurrence.

THOMAS C. AMORY, JR., *Chairman.*

*In Common Council, May 21, 1863.*

Concurred; and Messrs. Carpenter, Mears, Bradlee, Fisher, and Bird were joined.

GEORGE S. HALE, *President.*

Approved, May 22, 1863.

F. W. LINCOLN, JR., *Mayor.*

Political Science Research mem. Doc. 30 No. 17 Statute from Fish Co



## CITY OF BOSTON.

---

*In Common Council, June 3, 1863.*

YOUR Committee, charged to consider the propriety of some effort on the part of the City Government for the preservation of the Hancock House, now about to be demolished or removed from its site on Beacon Hill, submit the following

### REPORT.

We have all of us observed, with regret, events in progress, forcing upon the consideration of the City Council, what would more properly have devolved upon the State Legislature. That body has not taken any action which promises to prove effective for its preservation, and if this interesting historical monument is destined to perish, we should be able to satisfy our constituents, that no reasonable exertions were omitted, on our part, to prevent it.

The family, now about to convey the estate to others, have placed it in our power to remove the house, so that it may be preserved to future times at little cost; and they propose to transmit with it portraits and other valuable mementos of Governor Hancock, to give it character and interest. Their generous proposal to consecrate to the public, paintings of much historical and artistic value, which, from their sacred associations, must also be very precious to themselves, claims from their fellow-citizens the warmest acknowledgments. The following communication, which we have received from a member of the family, sufficiently expresses their intention: —

30 BEACON STREET, May 23, 1863.

THOMAS C. AMORY, JR., ESQ., *Chairman of the Committee on the Preservation of the Hancock House.*

The undersigned, in behalf of the heirs, begs leave to offer, as a gift to the City of Boston, the Hancock Mansion in Beacon Street, the pictures, and some other objects of historical interest now in the house. It is the wish of the donors, in making this offer, that the house should be preserved as a memento of our colonial and revolutionary history.

Respectfully, CHARLES L. HANCOCK.

It is proposed that the building shall be adorned not only with these historical portraits, but with other Revolutionary relics, which from time to time may be contributed from other sources, to keep in remembrance our heroic epoch.

To all familiar with our early national annals, it will seem superfluous to offer fresh tribute to the memorable name of Hancock. The distinguished part he took in the events that made of the alienated colonies of Great Britain a powerful, free, and for so many years a united people, will not be readily forgotten. Boston's most affluent and most honored merchant, with everything to expect from, and much to attach him to the existing monarchical rule, and with the most powerful inducements in his wealth and station to avoid the hazards and perils of rebellion, he was one of the earliest, most fearless, self-sacrificing of the patriots. His example of generous devotion, in that period of discouragement and gloom, incited the timid and wavering, and was invaluable to success. That he richly merited the general confidence, and the prominent position which he was called upon to occupy, is an inference natural and conclusive from the character of his associates. He would neither have been selected as President of the Provincial Congress here in Massachusetts, nor for so many years of fearful responsibility presided over that of the continent, had he not possessed the requisite endowments. We have the evidence of his most respected contemporaries, we have proof in his subsequent re-election in 1785

to the same high office, that he was not wanting in any quality of mind or character, which could entitle him to so proud a pre-eminence.

Men of professional training in their written remains, military geniuses by their campaigns and victories, leave behind them marks of their active participation in critical periods. But the services rendered to society, in moments of doubt and calamity, by personages of large social influence, sagacity, and public spirit, are often quite as important, and should be as gratefully remembered. What has come down to us from the pen of Hancock is creditable to his ability; his historical actions are sufficiently conspicuous; but his principal hold upon the hearts of his countrymen must be attributed to his unswerving loyalty to free institutions, to his fearless disregard of personal consequences, and the cheerful contribution of his means to secure our independence.

His claims to be especially remembered by the people of Boston, or Massachusetts, rest not alone upon national grounds. His long connection with municipal affairs, his official position as the first chief magistrate of the Commonwealth, and his continuance in the executive chair so long as he lived, except for a short period, when called upon a second time to preside over the Continental Congress, indicate the place which he occupied in their affection and confidence. This is no place to enumerate at length the noble traits of his character, or the public services to which he owed his elevation. Nor is it necessary, for they are as household words even to this distant generation.

It would not have been natural had he been so fortunate as to avoid all mistakes, to have escaped all enmities. It is not even now to be expected, that those who differ from his political opinions should cherish his memory as zealously as those whose views of public policy coincided with his own. There were many who regarded his pretensions as a candidate for the chief magistracy of the nation, as next to those of Washington. The friends of Mr. Adams, the successful competitor, naturally did what was

in their power to prevent his being selected. Similar rivalries and disappointments estranged from him other statesmen of his day, and the ashes are still warm with smouldering resentments. But his services to the country were too substantial, his historical career too illustrious, for his memory to be in this way seriously prejudiced. If disinterested devotion to the public does not always secure either power or place, it should and usually is able to gain the esteem of future times. Whatever tribute we may pay to James Otis or Joseph Hawley, to Samuel Adams or John Hancock, will but lessen the debt of gratitude, which we owe them for services rendered to the State. We honor the noble efforts, which we trust have rescued the home of Washington from decay. We would still pay homage to the Pinckneys and Marion, to Hamilton and Greene. But we have little faith in that patriotism, which sacrifices our own great memories to those of other States.

It is much to be regretted, that the recommendation of Governor Banks, in 1859, that the Legislature should purchase the estate, as a permanent residence for the Governors of Massachusetts, had not been carried out. Where the chief magistrate is selected from a remote part of the State, it is desirable that he should be tempted and find it convenient to remain a large portion of his time at the capital. The public business requires it, and the accommodations of a public house are not in character with the dignity and privacy of high official station. The building though sufficiently commodious, being of moderate dimensions, would have necessarily involved little expense for housekeeping, and could not have subjected him to the obligation of costly entertainments, for which, in its present reduced dimensions, it is wholly unsuited. By making the office of the chief magistracy equally convenient for eminent citizens from all parts of the State, this appropriation of the property would have been in correspondence with that provision of the Constitution, which secures equal rights to all who are candidates for office. The present accommodation at the State House for the business



of the State is contracted, and each year, with our natural development and accumulating archives, becomes more disproportionate to the public want. Had the property been purchased and not proved of use as an official residence, it would have supplied some other necessity of the public service, to be provided at a future day far less conveniently and economically.

There were other reasons why the State, in our estimation, should have seized the opportunity presented of possessing this ancient edifice on its present site. It is well known that it was the intention of Governor Hancock to give the whole property, embracing the State House grounds and extending to Joy Street on the west, and Derne Street to the north, to the State for executive purposes. The minutes for his will to this effect were under his pillow when he died. The estate which he had inherited from his uncle was still very considerable; his only child had accidentally perished; and he could make this disposition of his mansion-house estate without disappointing the just expectations of his nephews, who were his natural heirs. The year after his decease, that part of the domain now occupied for the State House was purchased of his family by the citizens of Boston, who gave it to the State for the accommodation of the government.

When the nephew died, in 1859, the family offered the Legislature the property then remaining to them, at a price of one hundred thousand dollars. A resolve was passed authorizing its purchase, provided the Governor, Lieutenant-Governor, Secretary of the Board of Education, the Attorney-General, Secretary, Treasurer, and Auditor, deemed it expedient. There was some delay in perfecting the title, and the opportunity was allowed to pass unimproved. It is to be regretted that the General Court, at its last session, had not been again called upon to consider the subject. Two of our wealthy citizens had, however, in the mean while, offered the heirs one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars for the estate, and their offer had been accepted. Two costly dwell-

ings, it is understood, will soon be erected where for the last century and a quarter has stood this handsome and now venerable abode. It has been so long one of the distinguishing features of Boston; we have so few ancient or historical edifices; its associations with provincial days, with Washington, Lafayette, and numberless events and personages of the greatest interest, are so precious both to the patriot and the antiquarian; it has moreover so many intrinsic claims to admiration for its elegance of design and beauty of proportion, within as well as without, that its destruction will be a source of profound regret to the city, and we may say it without the charge of exaggeration, to the whole country; not to this generation alone, but to those that are to follow us.

Should it be deemed enough of an object to preserve it upon another site, we are given to understand that it can be taken down and apart and put up again at a cost of seventeen thousand dollars, including the piling, foundations, grading of the lot, and fences. This estimate, based upon proposals made to our Committee by reliable persons, who stand ready to make good their figures, is believed to cover every possible expense attending the removal and reconstruction. Indeed, we have been informed by gentlemen not of the Committee, that it can be accomplished for twelve thousand dollars. We prefer, however, to state the largest amount, to prevent any possibility of disappointment. We have already been offered a contribution towards the expense of six thousand dollars, and we feel great confidence that public-spirited individuals will subscribe enough more in addition to the sum of six thousand dollars, which we recommend the City Council to appropriate by the order attached to our report, to effect the object. The Committee to have charge of the removal should not commence operations until assured of this assistance on the part of individuals at large.

Various spots have been proposed for its new location, different purposes to which it might be appropriated consistently with

the main object — its preservation as an historical monument of the first signer of the Declaration. As a guard-house for the Common and Garden Police on Flag-staff Hill, on the knoll, at the foot of the parade-ground, or between the Cemetery and Tremont Street, it could be made useful; but there are prejudices, perhaps well grounded, against erections of any description on the Common. By the popular vote of 1859, no building but a city hall or for horticultural purposes can be erected on the Garden. But this would not prevent its being placed on a line with the greenhouse, equidistant from the centre gate on the other side, to be used in part as a residence for the gardener, as a place of deposit for tools, or other articles needed for a garden; the principal apartments being dedicated to the pictures. The family of the gardener, without any cost of maintenance, would have the charge of the property; and draped in ivy or the Virginia-creeper, with its delicate green in summer, and rich crimson in winter, — surrounded with lilacs of the stock now standing about it, and with other shrubbery, — it would not intercept the view, or mar the landscape, but add much to the general effect.

This, on the score of economy, is the preference of a small portion of our Committee; much the larger number would prefer a different location. Nearly an acre of ground has been offered in Brookline, a spot on Bunker Hill has been proposed, but these are out of town, and not accessible to the public. Some spot on Dorchester Heights has also been suggested, and the lot belonging to the city, at the corner of Newbury and Berkley Streets been considered, but the high buildings in that immediate vicinity offer an objection. The most eligible lot, and that which we recommend, is the corner of Newbury and Clarendon Streets, opposite the southerly end of the lot given by the State to the Natural History and Polytechnic Societies. The Commissioners of the State Lands, to whom application was made by our Committee, received the suggestion with much favor, and gave us encouragement to hope, that if the plan met the approbation of

his Excellency the Governor, they would suffer the building to be placed at the spot indicated, on a lot of about nine thousand square feet. It was, of course, understood, that if the legislature, when convened, should disapprove, the building was to be removed. Upon consultation, no objection was made; and all seemed willing to repose that confidence in the wisdom and patriotism of Massachusetts to assume the risk and responsibility involved without hesitation. There was a conviction in the minds of some of us, that due respect would be paid to the appropriation of the proceeds of the Back Bay Lands to educational purposes, in making this disposition of a small portion of its area to an historical cabinet, and moreover, as an additional attraction it would tend to enhance the value of the territory, and swell the aggregate to be realized from sales. In reply to a written application for permission to occupy the lots proposed on sufferance, the communications annexed to our report was this day received. If the City Council confide the subject to our Committee with full powers to the limited extent proposed, it is probable that some arrangement may yet be made for the preservation of this time-honored edifice.

Your Committee, assured that public opinion would hold the City Council to strict account if it neglected any reasonable effort to accomplish the desired object, recommend the passage of the accompanying order.

THOMAS C. AMORY, JR.,  
SYLVANUS A. DENIO,  
JOHN S. TYLER,  
WILLIAM CARPENTER,  
GRANVILLE MEARS,  
J. T. BRADLEE,  
HORACE B. FISHER,  
LEWIS J. BIRD.

ORDERED : That Six Thousand Dollars be appropriated towards the removal and re-construction of the Hancock House, under the direction of the Committee on that subject ; *provided*, whatever other sum is needed for the purpose be subscribed by citizens at large ; the said six thousand dollars to be charged to the Reserve Fund.

## COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS.

---

OFFICE OF COMMISSIONERS ON PUBLIC LANDS,  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, *June 4, 1863.*

THOMAS C. AMORY, JR., ESQ., *Chairman of the Committee of the City Council:*

SIR: In reference to your communication to us of the 30th ultimo, we have the honor to reply that the powers conferred on this Board do not allow us to authorize an occupation of land for the purpose proposed, and that the proceeds of sales of all the lands belonging to the Commonwealth in the Back Bay, have already been appropriated by the Legislature for specific purposes. In case the City shall deem it worth while to assume the responsibility of the measure, we shall not object to the placing of the Hancock House upon a suitable lot of land, with the understanding that it shall be removed by the City, in case the Legislature at its next session shall not provide otherwise. It being understood that the whole subject is left open to the independent action of the Legislature. We think it right to add, that in our judgment the site suggested by you is not the best adapted to the purpose proposed.

We have the honor to be,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servants,

FRANKLIN HAVEN, } *Commissioners*  
EDWARD C. PURDY, } *on*  
CHARLES HALE, } *Public Lands.*





3 0112 098432138